

A
DECLARATION

Several Congregationall Societies
in, and about the City of LONDON.

In way of *Vindication* of themselves.

TOUCHING

- { 1. *Liberty.*
2. *Magistracy.*
3. *Propriety.*
4. *Polygamie.*

WHEREIN

Their Judgement concerning the particulars mentioned are tendred to consideration, to prevent mis-understandings.

33

1 COR. 9. 3.

My answer to them that examine mee is this,

PSAL. 31. 11.

False witnesses did rise up : they layed to my charge things that I know not.

Printed by *Matth. Simmons* in the year, 1647.

DECLARATION

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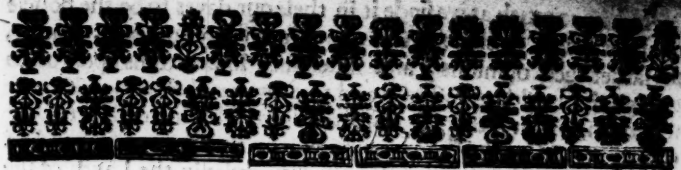
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A

DECLARATION

BY THE

Severall Congregationall Societies in, and about the City of
LONDON.



It is no new thing for the people of God, to be through malice mis-represented by some, and through weaknesse mis-apprehended by others, as touching the principles of their profession, and opinions about matters of Religion. And it cannot be denied, but that the erroneous opinions and irregular practices of some particular persons making profession of the same way, and passing under the same denomination with the servants of God themselves, have from time to time ministered occasion to the ignorant and weake to mis-conceive, and opportunity and advantage to the malicious to misshape the state and temper of the judgments and wayes of the generality of people fearing God, and *walking before him in truth with all their hearts.*

And in as much as we finde it in these our dayes to be the policie of adversaries, to cloath us in the skins of Savage beasts, that is, to fasten such opinions, and fasten such imputations upon us to engage the world against us, and to provoke all men to fall upon us, as, in which if there were matter of truth answerable to pretence, would indeed render us unworthy the society of men. And for as much also as there are some sad examples in the Land, of the vanity and wickednesse of some men, who, having professed the same way of worshipping God, & been called by the same name with our selves, have so farre fallen from the grace of God and the principles of their profession, as not onely to doe things inconvenient and unworthy the name of Christians, yea of men, but also to justify themselves therein as well-doers, to the great reproach of the Gospell, the breaking of our hearts, and the offence of the world before whom they have laid *the stumbling blockes of their iniquity*; wee cannot but judge, that, both in relation to the Gospell it selfe, (the honour of which is in great part involved in the innocency and honour of those people that hold it out unto the world, and accordingly suffers in their reproaches) as likewise in relation to men of the world, strangers to God, who harden themselves against the way of God and his servants upon the fore-mentioned occasion (the undeceiving and enlightning of whom lyes upon us as a duty to be endeavoured:) yea and in relation to our owne innocency and integrity, the which we are bound to vindicate on this behalfe:) a necessity lyes upon us to doe some act, by which the truth and reallity of our judgements and principles touching these things, wherein we so undeservedly suffer in the thoughts of men, may be brought out into an open light, to be beheld and known of all men; which then (we doubt not) will be found to bee nothing lesse, then what many have fancied them to be.

We are very sensible that some men have even filled the world with the noyse of their out-cries against us, as if wee were the advocates of all licentious liberty, disorder and confusion; but, how unjustly, will one day appeare to their shame.

It is true, we have asserted that as belonging unto men, which in some respect and consideration may be called, a *liberty*. But what *liberty*? Not a *liberty* to harme any man in word or deed:

nor

What liberty is pleaded for.

nor a *liberty* for any man to be corrupt, vaine, loose or inordinate in judgement, or conversation : for such a *liberty* as this can doe no man good. And God that knowes our hearts knowes that we desire not any *liberty* for any, but in order to the good of all.

But this is the *liberty* for which wee have appeared, viz. That while men behave themselves peaceably and justly as touching civill conversation, making no incroachments upon the civill power, nor any breaches upon the names and reputations, the estates or bodies of men; they might not suffer in their names, bodies, or estates from the hands of the Civill Magistrate, or any other men whatsoever, meerly for such things as appertaine to the worship of their God.

It is true, there are offences and miscarriages of men in matters of Religion, and things purely relating to Gods Kingdome, which we doe not at all exempt from correction, provided it be by a power and meanes suitable to the nature of such offences, which are spirituall and not about things of this world; but wee conceive withall that it doth not appertaine to the Civill Magistrate, so to engage his Magistraticall power against them, as to inflict a worldly or corporall punishment on men because of them. ^a For the Kingdome of God being not of this world (as the great Law-giver himselfe doth avouch) doubtlesse it is as improper for such a power which is but secular, and whose utmost bounds and adequate object are (as wee conceive) the Civill affaires of men, to intermeddle or umpire authoritatively in the affaires of Gods Kingdome, either by giving Lawes, or punishing offences therein, as it is for a King of one Kingdom by way of authority, to order affaires in another Kings Dominions. And as the Kingdome of God is Spirituall, and the affairs and concernments thereof spirituall, (and not such as are meates and drinks and other like accommodations for the body ^b) so those instruments and that power, viz. the word of God and Divine Censures, by which the things thereof are ordered, are spirituall also. ^a

And as these instruments and meanes are spirituall in their natures

^a Joh. 18
36

^b Rom. 14
17

^a 2 Cor. 10
4

tures, so are they mighty in their power, being able through God, (who hath appointed them) to pull downe strong holds, to cast downe imaginations, and every high thing that exalts it selfe against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, and to revenge all disobedience, &c.^c

Cor. 10.

4, 5, 6.

But the Civill power being in its nature onely such as it is in denomination, viz. secular: that is, the nature and constitution of it being worldly; ^d the direct and proper operations and effects of it are not like to be spirituall. For *That which is borne of the Spirit is Spirit, and that which is borne of the flesh is flesh.*^c That is, it is but flesh; of a nature and condition answering its cause producing it: And therefore the innate and intrinsicall property of the powers and authorities of this world being terrene, and calculated for the affaires thereof; we conceive they are not to act, but within their owne proper Spheare: or if they shall attempt to doe otherwise, miscarriage and disappointment in the undertaking is the best that can rationally be expected.

1 Pet. 2.

13.

Joh. 3. 6.

Besides, if God hath made those instruments and meanes which are spirituall, able and sufficient to cure those distempers in men which are of a spirituall nature, and offensive onely against a spirituall power and state; why should wee thinke that he should institute any other kind of meanes, such as is the secular power, for the same end? for when once God hath found one kind of meanes fit for his hand to accomplish his end by, he is not wont to constitute another for the same purpose. Upon which Principle of truth the Apostle builds a great assertion, accompanied with an asseveration; for (saith he) *if there had been a Law given, which could have given life, verily Righteousnesse should have been by the Law* (^f). If the Law had been given by God for that end, that men might be justified by it, he would then never have instituted another way and meanes, such as is that which is by faith, for the same purpose. And therefore we conceive, that we may with the same reason and truth assert; that if God hath instituted and made a spirituall power, and spirituall Engines and Instruments, effectually for all spirituall purposes, (the affirmative whereof is before proved,) then he hath not superadded another power, and meanes, and that of an inse-

Gal. 3. 21.

four

riour nature, such as is that which is but secular, for the same end.

How ever God being at liberty, doth in his providence sometimes make use of other meanes, such as are afflictions, &c. together with his spiritual institutions for the production of spirituall effects: yet confident we are, that he hath confined men to instituted rules onely, for the promotion of spirituall things appertaining to spirituall and instituted worship.

But as the Apostles, when they preached the Doctrine of justification by faith alone, excluding the workes of the Law, as having no part nor fellowship in that matter; were cryed out upon as destroyers of the Law, though in other respects, and such as were proper to the Law, they were the great assertors of it: even so while we doe but goe about by way of debate and argument, to keepe and preserve the Civill power within its due and proper bounds, distinct, and unconfounded with that power which is quite of another nature; we are exclaimd against by some (who have the boldnesse to affirme, or the weaknesse to beleieve) as if wee were enemies to all Magistracy and Government, and as if wee intended to throw downe those hedges that are set about mens estates, and to lay both the one and the other common: Though the truth is, wee have been, and resolve to be as faithfull assertors, and zealous maintainers, to our power, both of Magistracy, and just Government, and of the Liberty of mens persons, and propriety of their estates, (to speake without vanitie) as any other men whosoever.

And therefore wee declare in the first place, That man being fallen from that uprightnesse and perfection, in which at first he was created, and being now so farre from being commanded by principles of love, goodnesse, meeknesse, mercy, sobriety, and equity, as that hee is filled with lustfull inclinations, and dispositions to Fornication, Adultery, drunkennesse, extortion, fraud, reviling, theft, murder, witchcraft, perjurie, and to defile himselfe with man-kind, together with many other lamentable distempers, unto the

Magistra
necessar

the truth whereof both the word of God, and daily experience will abundantly witnesse? Wee cannot but apprehend an absolute necessity, both of Governours, and Government, to bridle and restraints men from falling foule one upon another, and from doing things destructive, not onely to the honour, and rights, but even to the safety and beings of others. For whilst those noysome lusts doe rage, and raigne in men; what other thing can be Imagined sufficient to guard the persons, the honour and estates of men from suffering violence, but the sword of the Magistrate? And therefore, looke what necessitie there is for men to enjoy themselves in safety, and honour, the same necessitie there is of Lawes and Governours.

And as Magistracy and government in generall is *the Ordinance of God*, which he in love to the world hath appointed for the good of men^(c).

Rom. 13.
1, 2, 4.

2. And as we doe not disapprove any forme of Civill government which hath a direct tendancie and subordination to its proper end; so we doe freely acknowledge, that a Kingly government, bounded by just and wholesome Lawes, is both allowed by God,^(c) and a good accommodation unto men.

Pet. 2.
1, 14.
Sam. 23.

3. And however it be a thing very desirable to have such to bee governours, as feare the Lord, in as much as together with their morall principles, they are under the solemne engagement of Christianity to execute Judgement and Justice, and faithfully to discharge their trust; and will be more readie to protect godly men (who generally are the hatred of world) and to propagate the Gospell in their territories, then other men will be: yet whatever the Magistrate is, in point of Religion, he is to be revered, and obeyed in all those commands of his, which doe not intrench upon, or rise up in opposition to the commands of God, or fall crosse to the common interest of men, the maintenance whereof is his, and in his charge.

And

And in as much as variety of actions, and unanimity in endeavours, are necessary in the management of publique affaires, And since every man is not a like qualified for the same action, nor hath that discretion and propension of his owne accord to fall into that place which is most proper for him; and since also there is so much darknesse remaining in the mindes of men, as to make them subject to call evil, good, and good, evil; and so much pride in their hearts, as to make their owne wills a Law not unto themselves onely, but unto others also; it cannot but be very prejudiciall to humane society, and the promotion of the good of Commonwealths, Cities, Armies, or families, to admit of a parity, or all to be equall in power. Because there being (in this case) a Liberty for every man to follow the dictates of his own understanding, and to act as he pleaseth in reference to the Publique, what can be expected but disorders, confusions, jealousies, factions, yea Civill warres themselves? For as mens apprehensions of the common interest, but especially their opinions of the conduciblenesse of means thereunto, are (almost infinitely) various, and contradictory to each other: so is it naturall for them to indulge their owne opinions, and violently to pursue, even unto blood, their own meanes, which seeme only to themselves to be such; and that in opposition to those meanes, which in the eye of wiser men, and in themselves, are such, indeed. And therefore we cannot but conclude, that the ranging of men into severall and subordinate ranks and degrees, is a thing necessary for the common good of men, as being the onely meanes to remove obstructions, and to preserve order, and agreement in all agitations tending thereunto.

Touching propriety wee further declare, that however the wants and necessities of men, are a call from God to those that have wherewithall in their hands to minister to them and relieve them in their need; and that where the love of God dwels richly in the soule it doth enlarge the heart of men in compassion, and their hands in bounty towards their brethren in distress, who are as *their owne flesh*, yet certainly, for any man so large such a community amongst men in the good things of this life as necessary, which dissolves mens propriety in them;

Of Pro-
priety

is not only a cutting off from men one of those gracious opportunities which God hath put into their hands, of expressing the good worke of God upon their hearts, and of displaying the power and glory of his grace, but 'it is also, a rendering the Scriptures (the honour and authority whereof, is more deare and precious to us then our lives.) in many places, to bee but so many words written in vaine. For men by refreshing the bowells of the hungry, cloathing the naked, harbouring the stranger, &c. doe not only declare, that the *love of God dwells in*

(k) 1 John
3. 17.

them; (k) that is, a benevolent disposition towards men in misery, answering that tender, compassionate and bountifull disposition that is in God towards miserable men, but they doe God hereby an especiall service in relieving such, the care, and maintenance of whom, he hath peculiarly taken upon himselfe. In which respects amongst others, that saying of our Savi-

Act 20. 35

our is verified, It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive, m. But if all things were common unto all, there would be no place left for any such difference as is between giving and receiving, or if there were, both the one and the other would turne to the same account. But what ever account other men make of such opportunities by which they may at once both blesse the world, and blesse themselves, comfort men and please God, expresse the grace of God to others, and endear it to themselves: certainly, they are, and ought to be precious in our eyes: and therefore that opinion which would adnull them, cannot but bee cast out of our judgements and thoughts as an unclean thing.

And when that Commandment (for so it is interpretatively) went forth unto Christian men, *to provide for their own, especially those of their own households;* for that end amongst others; that the Church might not be burdened with them. *o* Undoubtedly, either there was a difference between the Churches stocke and that which particular persons did possesse, or else the Apostle must needs speak very impertinently, the later of which to assert, were to blaspheme that Spirit by which he wrote,

1 Tim.
5. 8, 16.

When *Solemon* saith, *The diligent hand maketh rich, p* and *drowsinesse shall cloathe a man with ragges;* *q* questionlesse his Proverbe was more than Paradox, if both the diligent and slothfull were to inherit an equal portion. In

p Prov.
10. 24.
q Prov.
23. 21.

In a word, if this conceit of community should stand, the difference between poore and rich, borrowing and lending, buying and selling, communicating and receiving, would all fall; upon the foundation of which notwithstanding, God hath built many injunctions of duty unto men.

And as for that instance and example of those Primitive Christians, amongst whom it is said, that *all things were common*, and that *not any man said, that the things which he possessed were his own*, it is (as we conceive) to be understood thus, The sense of that blessednesse which was come upon them by the belief of the joyfull message of salvation, preached to them, was so great, vigorous and strong, and did so dilate and enlarge their hearts in good will both towards God and Man, that the good things of this world which they possessed were very little esteemed by them: and therefore they parted with them as freely to their brethren that had need, as men use to part with those things which are not their own: their particular propriety and interest in them, was not so considered and insisted on, as any wise to binde their hands from dispersing or scattering abroad, the tokens of that love and great content under which they then were. And if more of this temper of heart, and bounty of hand were in the world, than now is to be found amongst us, it were not a thing to be declared against, but to be rejoyced at by Christians. But though these Christians acted so, as if they had had no interest, or propriety in their Estates, yet certainly a propriety they had, nor was this propriety dissolved merely by their becoming Christians, as appeares plainly by what was spoken by the Apostle Peter to *Ananias*, who was in pretence one of those bountifull Benefactors afore mentioned.

For the Apostle in reprovving him for his dissimulation, in pretending to dedicate to common use the whole price of his possession, being sold, when as hee reserved part thereof unto himselfe: saith thus unto him, *Woldest it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?* By which double interrogation the Apostle doth emphatically grant and affirme a particular and distinct right which hee, and so consequently those other Benefactors had to their pos-

essions, both before they had sold them and after, unless they had passed the same away by a voluntary act of donation or free gift.

If therefore God hath built up a wall of separation between the estates of men and men, the affirmative whereof sufficiently appeares by many acts of his will, then farre be it from us who professe our selves to be his servants, that we should indeavour to throw it downe.

And In as much as those Apostolicall Churches themselves recorded in the Scriptures, in which the glory and power of the Gospell ruled, were not altogether free from such persons as turned the grace of God into wantonnesse, (u) and that abused their liberty in the Gospell to the gratifying of the flesh, (x) we cannot promise the world that they shall never finde any such amongst us. For whilst there are temptations without and corruptions within that expose men to the danger of falling, and that all men that professe strictnesse in Religion are not so vigilant and wise as to stand upon their guard, it cannot bee but that offences will come.. (x)

(u) Jude 2.
(w) Gal 5.
13.
(x) Mat.
18. 7.

And though some who are willing to picke a quarrell with Religious men, if elevated above the sphere of their owne activity, and are glad when they meet with any thing in their lives and wayes as will comport with, and smile upon that evill opinion they have of them: Yet we could wish, that all who pretend to wisdom, ingenuity and honesty, would not be so injurious to God and Religion, as to charge personall and particular errors and practices, such as favour of the flesh, and tend to obscure and darken the beauty of holinesse, either upon the Generallity of the servants of God, or upon the grounds and principles of their profession, but that they would put such a difference herein, as becomes men of sobriety and truth, to see.

Of Pely-
gamic.

And therefore, if any scurrilous persons shall of purpose to blemish Religion, and to make themselves glad with lies, give it out as if we intended to enlarge and extend wedlock by Law established in this Land (in which provision is made that no man shall have above one wife at one time) Beyond its due limits, or that we gave any quarter in our judgments to such an opinion,

opinion as favors plurality of wives: or if any who have been looked upon as professors of religion have so fearfully saine as to break through bounds not only of Religion, but also of morality, and to defile themselves with those that are not their wives, & to cover their shame that go about to plead the lawfulness of polygamy, we earnestly desire, that all men may do both us & that way of Religion which we profess in the world that right, as not in the least to charge either the one or the other therewith, as if we were any patrons thereof. For we do with great zeale and detestation of soule declare and protest against the folly and filthinesse of such persons, and of any such opinion as is that now last mentioned, as being contrary to the Scriptures of truth.

For though God, having the residue of the Spirit, could in the day of creation as easily have made more women then that one which he did create for one man (as the Prophet Malachy observes;) (1) yet his pleasure was to make but one, to the end there might be a godly seed, or a seed of God, that is, a seed propagated according to Gods institution and appointment. (1) Mal. 2. 15.

And therefore our Saviour referring to the first institution of marriage for correction of some corruptions and abuses of men about marriage, saith, Have yee not read, that hee which made them at the beginning, made them male and female? for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twaine (not they three or they foure, but they twaine) shall bee one flesh. (2) Answerably the Apostles advice is, for the avoyding of fornication, that every man should have his owne wife, (not wives) and every woman her owne husband, (not husbands.) (a) (2) Mat. 19. 3. 5. (1) 1 Cor. 7. 2.

And when the Apostle gives those cautions concerning such who were to be chosen into the office of a Bishop or Deacon, viz. that they should be men that had but one wife, as well as men that were not given to wine, nor strikers, nor greedy of filthy lucre; & undoubtedly, he accounted the one as well as the other a blot and matter of dishonour, otherwise he would never have put it in the number of those things, whereof he made matter of exception in the election of such Officers. b 1 Tim. 3. 2. 3. Tit. 1. 6.

And when our Lord Jesus Christ (who is Truth it selfe) uttered this grave saying, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it c March. 16. 9.

be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, he had not said true but upon this supposition, that a man commits whoredom with what ever woman he shall marry over and besides that one wife unto which he hath first joyned himselfe, the bands of that Conjunction not being dissolved. For otherwise his putting away a former wife injuriously could no wife disable him from marrying a later. For can a mans doing one unlawfull act make him incapable of doing another act that's lawfull? And therefore as all other words of the lips of Jesus Christ, which continually dropp'd wisdom and grace, are dear and precious to us, so these also have taken hold of our hearts so, as to cause us to abominate the very opinion, and how much more the practice of Polygamy, as rising up in opposition against them!

Thus having shaken off those Vipers of calumnie and reproach, which some unworthily have laboured to fasten upon us; and having cleared our own innocency both before Angels and men, as touching those things whereof either in whole or in part we have been either accused or suspected by malevolent men: our hope is, that all men (except those that have joyned themselves in a confederacie with Hell, and have stricke hands with the Devil, as being resolved with him to accuse the brethren) into whose hands this ingenuous and solemn Declaration of ourselves shall come, will both perceive and believe, that wee are no friends or favourers either of those unrighteous wayes against which we have now declared more particularly, or of any other thing that is contrary to wholesome Doctrine. d

For so farre are we from patronizing or tolerating any thing of this nature, that our earnest desire is, that the Magistrate into whose hand the sword of justice is put, may draw it out impartially against all those, whether pretenders, or not pretenders to any strictnesse in Religion, that doe in word or deed disturbe the Civil peace of the Land; in doing or speaking things destructive to the honour, safety or interests of men, in body, name or goods.

And our unfained desire likewise is, that wee with all other men, and all other men with us, may by patientte, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindnesse, by the Holy Ghost, by love, unsatished, by the word

word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness, on the right hand and on the left (e) oppose and contend against all unrighteousnesse of men, and what ever in them, either in opinion or conversation rises up against the honour of the Gospell, and the well-being of men. That so the civill and externall peace of men may by the sword of the Magistrate be secured on the one hand, and their spirituall and internall peace effected, maintained and defended by the sword of the Spirit on the other hand, from suffering by the hands of those *fleshly lusts*, crooked and perverse imaginations *which war against the soule* (f) ^{(e) 2 Cor. 6.6.7.} ^{(f) 1 Pet. 3.11.}

The high and honourable advancement of which peace of men in both kinds, shall through the helpe of the most High, be the subject matter of our studies, labours and prayers, during our pilgrimage on earth, that God in all things may bee glorified through Jesus Christ; to whom be praise in all the Churches of the Saints. *Amen.*

FINIS.
